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Old Spy Betrayal Put to Rest by Ex-Mountie's Plea

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OTTAWA, Jan. 23—Until the former Mountie appeared on a Canadian television show disguised in a wig and false mustache a few years ago, the Government didn't seem to be very interested that he had disclosed the identity of a Canadian double agent to the Soviet Union.

Today, 30 years after he first passed secrets to two Soviet agents in Ottawa, the former corporal in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, James D. F. Morrison, surprised the Supreme Court of Ontario and pleaded guilty in one of Canada's most controversial spy cases.

The prosecution in his trial charged that he betrayed the double agent, who was code-named Gideon, for 3,500 Canadian dollars — currently about \$2,500.

The K.G.B. double agent, who had infiltrated into Canada, supplied the mounted police with valuable information about Soviet espionage activities. After Mr. Morrison tipped off the Russians, the spy who had turned was recalled to the Soviet Union, and is believed to have been executed.

An Argument on Rights

Mr. Morrison, who is now 69 years old, once argued that the pressing of charges against him so many years later violated his rights under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Supreme Court of Ontario rejected this assertion in June 1984.

Today, he cut short the complicated trial by pleading guilty to one count of unlawfully communicating secret information to two Soviet agents between April 1955 and January 1958 for a purpose prejudicial to the safety or interests of Canada.

In return, the prosecution dropped two related charges that restated his violations of Canada's Official Secrets Act.

The former Mountie could be sentenced to life in prison. Justice Coulter Osborne of the province's Supreme Court, who is hearing the case, said today that he would pass sentence May 26.

Oddly, Mr. Morrison, whom the Royal Canadian Mounted Police once code-named Long Knife to conceal his identity, had confessed his story to his superiors back in 1957. He was demoted and dismissed from the mounted police in 1958 after he also tried to pocket 1,400 Canadian dollars given him to spend on wiretaps.

Charged in 1958

But Mr. Morrison was not formally charged with passing information to the Soviet Union until 1963, after he had appeared in disguise on "Fifth Estate," a documentary television program, to talk about it. The mounted police moved to impound the program tape, three minutes of which were shown to the jury Wednesday.

The betrayal was publicized earlier in a book, "For Services Rendered," written by John Sawatsky, a Canadian journalist who investigated the case.

The prosecution portrayed the former corporal as a free-spender who wanted the money to pay off heavy debts. He had worked for a plainclothes surveillance unit of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police that kept tabs on suspected spies and foreign agents. A new agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service took over the counter-espionage role from the mounted police in July 1964.

Valuable but Temperamental

In 1953, a Soviet agent apparently named Brik, who had entered Canada to assume the identity of a Montreal photographer named David Soboloff, defected, bringing details about other Soviet spies and their operations. The real David Soboloff had gone back to the Soviet Union.

The Canadians code-named the defector Gideon, passed on some of his information to allies in the North Atlantic

Treaty Organization and controlled information sought by the Russians about a jet fighter project called Avro Arrow.

Terrance Guernsey, a retired Royal Canadian Mounted Police superintendent, told the court Wednesday that Gideon was the most valuable double agent recruited since World War II. But he was also temperamental, according to the report, and periodically refused to cooperate further with the mounted police, saying he wanted to live quietly in Canada.

After Gideon's handlers placated him during a visit to Ottawa in 1955, Mr. Morrison, who normally performed routine surveillance duties, was ordered to drive the double agent to Montreal.

According to the opening statement at the trial this week by Douglas J. A. Rutherford, an Assistant Deputy Attorney General of Canada's Justice Department, Mr. Morrison learned who

Gideon really was and later approached the Russians to sell them the double agent's identity for 3,500 Canadian dollars.

He was accused of passing information to the two Soviet agents, Nikolai Ostrovsky and Rem Krasilnikov, between April 1, 1955, and Jan. 31, 1958, to cover his debts.

After the double agent was called home to the Soviet Union, Mr. Rutherford said, he was never heard from again.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police dismissed Mr. Morrison in 1958, but he was not immediately charged with violating the Official Secrets Act. He worked as a construction safety instructor in British Columbia before his arrest in 1963.

Mr. Morrison, who looked impassive at his trial this week, protested in an interview several years ago that he did not sell out his country, but only one Russian "down the drain."